

Some time back, the following appeared in the ranch column of a daily newspaper: "For sheep and cattle, a combination woven and barbed wire should be used; 32-inch woven wire with two stands of barbed wire will give an economical four foot high fence." The article went on to reveal that good fencing is safe for livestock, requires a minimum of maintenance, and improves the appearance of the rangeland. Credit for these findings was given to an extension engineer from a large agriculture college.

After ascertaining that the item wasn't intended as a jest or for submission to a pioneer newspaper, I began to brood over the possible undertones. Did the engineer suspect that ranchers were planning on rolling up their existing fences? Did he realize that the drouth that was going on at the time the article was published had depressed ranch citizens to the degree that their chins were rubbing the buttons off their collars. Or, had the fence adviser become so engrossed in his studies that he failed to notice that the Shortgrass Country had been under fence for some 60-odd years?

For days the proposition haunted me. I knew that plenty of hombres were sorry that their earmarks and brands were a matter of public record. I also knew that the dreadnought, double-barreled bogey of all ranchdom is the fear that some day herders will get so sick of being choused by every agency of government from the fish pond inspectors to the president that they would abandon the flocks and become another of history's lost tribes.

I watched the column for several weeks, hoping that a follow up would appear. An abundance of good advice was printed. Ranchers were cautioned to watch out for rattlesnakes. Wives were warned not to blow out their pressure cookers. But nothing more was printed about fence building.

Other journals and papers were equally as barren of fence building instructions. Evidently the extension engineer had made a one-shot stand. For that matter, discounting that he was six decades too late, his material was sound. Woven wire and barb wire have made good fence for sheep and cattle. Two strands of barb wire have indeed been spaced above 32-inch net to give a four-foot high fence. The word "economical" could be a point of argument nevertheless, I see no reason in becoming contentious over a matter that was settled in 1910. It'd be sheer nitpickery, for example, to start fussing about Theodore Roosevelt calling his troops Rough Riders.

Surely the last hasn't been heard from this fence expert. He still hasn't covered the value of cedar posts and steeples. Two more paragraphs, at the least, can be written on the proper tools for building fence, and a long thesis could be devoted to digging and tamping postholes. Without any trouble at all, he could fill several chapters, using interviews with families who have been using the type fence he recommends for three generations. No doubt about it. His topic could cover a mass of material.

I am going to keep watching for another piece of advice by the same fellow. He'll be back one of these days. Thinkers of that caliber aren't born every yesteryear. I wonder what he knows about windmills and cottonseed cake.